

CONFIDENTIAL

LANGUAGE

HIGHLIGHTS

**A REVIEW OF FOREIGN
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENTS
OF INTEREST TO
AGENCY PERSONNEL**

AUGUST 1971

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LANGUAGE HIGHLIGHTS

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**INQUIRIES, COMMENTS, AND CONTRIBUTIONS
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On 12 March 1971 a new Agency-wide program was initiated to spur the development of proficiencies in languages which the Agency has in short supply -- or for which a future shortage is anticipated. This is not the first time, of course, that the Agency has offered monetary awards for language proficiency. In 1957-63 over \$765,000 was paid out to personnel who could demonstrate through a proficiency test that they had achieved or maintained reading or speaking skills in a modern language. Perhaps the most beneficial effect of that program was that we found out for the first time how many people there were in the Agency who had at least some foreign language proficiency.

We also learned that even though we have a good supply of speakers of most languages, the employee with a language skill is not always in the job that requires it. The purpose of the new program, then, is not only to encourage more people to study languages, but to get people to learn specific languages to meet specific requirements in specific components. The new program differs principally from the old in that:

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1. The new regulation [REDACTED] does not provide cash awards for the maintenance of skills that an employee already has, but only for the achievement of new skills.

2. The new program is not on a voluntary basis: to be eligible for an award an individual must be designated by his component to achieve specific skills at the level of proficiency determined by the component (which also provides the funds for the award).

Also different from the old program is the fact that cash awards will not be paid for new skills in all languages. Each Directorate establishes its own list of incentive languages, approved by the Deputy Director concerned, according to needs reported by operating officials. The lists are subject to constant review and revision, so the best source of information about the current list of awardable languages in your Directorate is your Senior Training Officer.

Because languages differ, incentive languages have been grouped into three categories, according to the degree of difficulty each poses for the English-speaking student. The languages in Group III are considered the most difficult for English-speakers to learn, and awards for achievement of skills in them are the highest. Awards are made in either the Specialized Program (e.g., Reading only, or Speaking only) or the Comprehensive Program, requiring competence in reading, speaking, and understanding. Awards in the Specialized Program are half those in the Comprehensive. Following is the cash awards schedule in the Comprehensive Program:

LANGUAGE INCENTIVE PROGRAM

C O N F I D E N T I A L

1

ILLEGIB

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ALL LANGUAGES ARE EQUALLY DIFFICULT

There is practical, as well as theoretical proof of the above statement. The theoretical argument goes: the more complex a language is, the more useful it is to those who speak it. The more distinctions a language makes, the more you can say in that language. But there is a limit -- the capacity of the human mind. Each person develops his language to the limit of his mental capacity; the language of a genius is more complex, grammatically as well as in its vocabulary, than the language of a moron. But this difference is merely quantitative, whereas there is a qualitative difference between language and animal communication on the level, for example, of dogs or crows.

The practical proof runs as follows: if language A were actually less difficult than language B, children would learn to speak it sooner than children learning language B. This does not happen. Children learning to speak any language acquire grammatical mastery of it at about the same age. Depending on the definition of "grammatical mastery," this varies from five to seven years, but it is the same for any language.

When we talk about "difficult languages," we are talking about the difficulty English speakers have in learning them. This is, of course, based on how different the language is from English. The more similar a language is to English, the easier it is for English speakers to learn, and vice versa.



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STATINTL

"Probably not. And, Mr. [REDACTED] do you have any idea of your language aptitude?"

"That's a fair indication of good aptitude. But what I'm leading up to is that the chances of your getting anywhere with self-study in Chinese are pretty slim. The Agency does not have any record of any student reaching a useable proficiency in Chinese in a part-time study program at the Language School, much less by self-study."

"It depends on definitions, of course. A useable proficiency is the 2-level in reading and speaking, and the estimated time it takes to reach this level in Chinese is 1500 hours of class work. At nine hours a week, the average part-time load, that comes to 167 weeks, or close to four years. And that is still far short of full professional competence."

"We take them full time for eleven months. At the end of that time, they are at the 2-level in speaking and 1+ in reading. Then they get another full year of full-time training [REDACTED] At the end of that time, they should have reached full professional competence."

"Most people don't realize it. Of course, in a language like Spanish or German, you might expect to reach 2+ in speaking and 3 in reading in six or seven months of full-

liked that pretty well. I guess that wasn't the intensive method, though, was it?"

"Not really. I did pretty well in my German course, and as I say, I liked it."

"Oh, it can't be as bad as that!"

"How does the Agency train Chinese language people?"

"I had no idea it would take that long."

STATINTL

Time study."

"That's not necessarily true. You can lay a very useful foundation in part-time study. Then when you get to where the language is spoken you can really start learning to speak it. After all, how much German could you really speak after two years in college?"

"Then there isn't really much point in anything but full-time language training."

"I am afraid so. Especially since there are no really useable self-study materials in Chinese."

"I see what you mean. Then self-study in Chinese would be pretty hopeless."

"There the picture is not nearly so bleak. A person who has had some language experience might pick up quite a bit of one of the easier languages by self-study."

"How about other languages?"

The above conversation illustrates a good many common, but fallacious ideas about language training, particularly the use of tapes. Since World War II, great strides have been made in teaching languages by the intensive method, and the use of tapes has been an important part of the improvement. The wholly wrong impression has spread that language tapes are the sole reason for the improvement -- that they are some sort of miracle medium.

Actually, the most important element in a language course is the teacher. A good, professional language teacher can take almost any set of materials and do a good job. By far the most important element in the success of the language instruction at LS/COR is the professional competence and devotion to duty of the instructors. The number and quality of the tapes available is definitely secondary.

Success in self-study demands high motivation and adequate aptitude, but it also requires a good set of materials designed for self-study. Unfortunately, such materials are currently available in a discouragingly small number of languages. Self-study is also more likely to be successful if the student already knows one or more foreign languages. Another area where self-study is likely to succeed is in reinforcing or improving proficiency in a language the student already knows something about. For all these reasons, the Language School makes self-study materials available on a loan basis for all Agency personnel.

SELF STUDY MATERIALS

The Language School maintains a loan program of texts and tapes for self-study available to all Agency personnel. Material is available in 25 languages, from Arabic to Vietnamese. These materials are mostly at the beginning level. The procedure is normally for the student to borrow the text and the first three tapes. The text is loaned for the duration of the self-study, and the tapes for a week, with a week's extension on request. When the student returns the first three tapes, he receives the next three, and so on. This process continues until he has completed his course of self-study, when he returns the text and the last three tapes. The student or his component must provide a tape recorder to use with the tapes.

The librarian will be happy to furnish information on the self-study program. Call June on extension 3477 at the Language School Library, Room 214, [REDACTED]

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The LS lab is frequently asked to make duplicate copies of tapes. Requestors should understand that it costs practically the same amount to duplicate tapes at the LS lab as it does to purchase them on the open market. The heavy demands on duplicating equipment also lead to considerable delays on most orders. As a result, it is usually cheaper and quicker to satisfy demands for commercially available tapes on the open market. There are, moreover, certain legal restraints on the copying of copyrighted tapes.

In the case of tapes produced at LS/OTR, or other tapes not commercially available, arrangements can be made to satisfy reasonable requests based on linguistically sound requirements and operational necessity.

FOR SPOTTERS

..... ONLY

The Language School is always interested in spotting good teachers of foreign languages. There is not always an immediate vacancy, but it is a good bet there will be one soon. Due to resignations, retirements, maternity leave, and other causes, we are constantly experiencing a turnover in teaching personnel. In addition, demands on the School for language instruction are steadily growing, causing us to be constantly on the watch for new teaching talent.

What are we looking for? We want well-informed or educated native speakers, preferably young and with teaching experience. Once in a while, a non-native who has lived in the country of the language concerned for a long period will also qualify. This, of course, is the optimum, but often, for languages in which the supply of qualified personnel is scarce, we have to settle for less. For all teaching personnel, however, a reasonably good command of English is required.

Absolutely essential to the hiring of any teacher is the granting by security of at least a Type B clearance (with access to an Agency building). Chances are best for American citizens, and next best for Resident Aliens. Individuals with some other types of visas, other than for permanent residency, are also eligible. Those with diplomatic, tourist, or student visas, however, are definitely ineligible.

While there has been a long history of emigration from European and Latin American countries to the United States, the pattern of emigration from the Middle East and South-east Asia has been quite different. The supply of potential teachers from these areas is relatively small. Often, our best lead is the spouse of an Agency employee, American official, or serviceman.

To get leads to potential teachers of "rare" languages, we resort to such sources as the Immigration and Naturalization Service, friends of current teachers, and other grapevine methods. The results of even these methods are sometimes frustratingly meager. We need help in our spotting task, and ask all Agency personnel aware of potential teachers to contact the Language School on extension 3055 and give us such leads as they may have, keeping in mind that the potential instructor must be professionally competent or on a level such that with a little training he could be brought to professional competence.

ARE WE LOSING OUR

LANGUAGE CAPABILITY ?

During Calendar Year 1970 through retirements and resignations the Agency lost 198 speaking and reading proficiencies at the 4 (High) and 5 (Native) levels. During the same period 49 new employees brought a 4- or 5-level language competence to the Agency. However, during this same period, a total of 55 employees already on board brought their tested proficiency to a 4 or 5 level through further practice abroad and/or further training.

HOW MANY ARE STUDYING FOREIGN LANGUAGES?

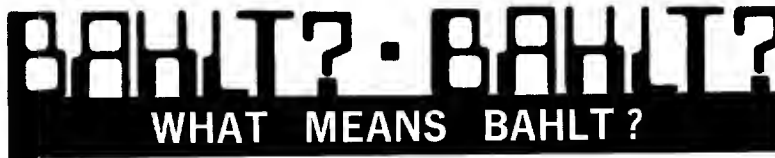
Inside the Agency 616 persons studied a foreign language in FY 71. This breakdown was as follows:

244 full-time students at the Language School
267 part-time students at the Language School
105 students in the BAHLT program

A total of 64 Agency personnel studied at other government schools or at commercial schools in CY 70 for reasons of cover, advanced training, or because the Language School does not offer the language concerned.

In CY 70 a total of 570 employees were studying a wide range of languages [REDACTED]

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The BAHLT (Before and After Hours Language Training) Program is completing another successful season. Proposals for implementing the 1971/72 BAHLT Program have been approved by the Language Development Committee. First and second-year basic instruction will continue to be offered in French, German, Russian, and Spanish. The Language School expects to experiment during the coming academic year with programmatic instruction in Spanish; this, if successful, will make it possible to accommodate more students than can regular classes. Another proposed change in the BAHLT Program is the plan to hold some classes at the Language School, instead of only at Headquarters. Under the new ground rules, classes will be conducted strictly during off-duty hours, three or four days per week for 40 weeks. Bulletins will be issued, announcing the program and soliciting applications from staff employees who desire to become instructors.

KNOW YOUR IDIOMS

A major problem in learning the vocabulary of a language is idiom. An idiom is an expression that means more than the literal sum of its parts. A man may walk the floor all night with a colicky baby, but he is not necessarily a floorwalker. Once you know the meaning of "floorwalker," its derivation is fairly clear, but it is not always so easy to deduce an idiom's derivation. Most English speakers might guess that "go off half-cocked" has its derivation from shooting, but how many know that "a flash in the pan" is also connected with guns? Or that "mad as a hatter" derives from the effect of mercury (formerly used in making felt) on the mind and personality of a person engaged in that trade? The situation is even worse when popular usage changes a word, as in the English "cockroach," which has nothing to do with cocks or roaches, but is simply the way that the Spanish cucaracha ended up in English. These examples are from English, but a similar list could be made up from any language. Just as English and American idioms can be expected to give difficulty to a foreigner learning English, so the idioms in a foreign language are difficult for English speakers. Moreover, as the examples discussed below indicate, even native speakers are not always consistent in the idioms they use.

TOO MANY COOKS SPOIL THE BROTH

Take a minute to think over the above title -- Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth -- do you see anything wrong with it? If, after thinking about it, it still seems right, compare it with the following: Too many cooks spoils the broth. Comparing the two, you will readily see why the latter is the correct version. What we are saying when we use the idiom is not that an inordinate number of cooks make awful soup, but that having too many advisers can be harmful to any endeavor. Of course, in calling this the "correct" version, we are mindful of the fact that in language any usage is correct if enough people say it or if it is generally acceptable to the majority of speakers.

I COULD CARE LESS

With respect to this idiom, you might be justified in disputing which is the "correct" version, the above or the alternate I couldn't care less, since the former is heard almost as frequently as the latter. Let's just say the latter is more logical, expressing as it does the sense of the idiom, that is, complete indifference. It is interesting in passing to note the differing intonation and stress patterns between the two versions: I could care less versus I couldn't care less.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT STATE

The emphasis placed on foreign languages by the Department of State is evident from the following instruction to Career Management Officers, to be included in forthcoming issues of State's Career Assignments Projection Manual:

It is the Department's objective that officers reaching senior rank have S-3/R-3 proficiency in two foreign languages. It is desirable that proficiency in at least one of the languages be at S-4/R-4.

In making all assignments, careful attention should be given to language proficiency. Officers with S-2/R-2 proficiency should be projected to training and assignments that will enable them to attain a level of S-3/R-3. Such assignments should be in the context of the officer's functional and area specialization. In all comprehensive counseling sessions, personnel officers should discuss the two-language objective and the steps to be taken toward meeting it.



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